



(U) Learning from the Masters

FROM: [REDACTED]
(S//SI) Missile Proliferation (S2G22)
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(U) How a young Airman was trained by some of the Agency's best linguists, such as Norman Wild (pictured)...

(S//SI) In 1972, just after completing Air Force basic training, I had the extremely good fortune to be first assigned to NSA prior to overseas deployment. I was placed in the old B-Group, Asian Communist Air / Air Defense Forces, which I think was designated B34 at the time. The office designators must seem kind of quaint today, but at that time the bulk of agency manpower and resources was detailed against the Red Menace, and, of course, military support. I could not have had a better assignment, as it turned

out.

(U) I was given a desk next to one of the premier agency linguists, [Norman Wild](#). The qualities and talents that earned him Agency "Hall of Fame" status were lavished on one lowly Air Force two-striper. I marveled how he was able to lead me through particularly knotty graphic Vietnamese exchanges with humor, grace and a spirit of partnership.

(S//SI) Having all the reason in the world to be condescending or supercilious, (he taught himself Cambodian over the course of a few weekends), Norm instead would give me useful insights (such as that Vietnamese technical status reports were like a patient describing a medical condition to a doctor); commentary on the relative importance of seemingly inconsequential information ("Its all part of a big mosaic picture"); and comedy ("Jeez, I think this guy bought the same car I did" -- this last over a transcript concerning the vehicle status report of a North Vietnamese radar company). The person least impressed with Norm's abilities was Norm himself.

(S//SI) In addition to Norm, I was privileged to work with [REDACTED] (another preeminent linguist, the translator for South Vietnam's equivalent of DIRNSA and once cut off with the Marines at Khe Sanh), [REDACTED] (a master of Vietnamese air defense operations and a nearly identical twin of the bandleader Spike Jones) and Lt. Col. [REDACTED] who (although I did not know it at the time) was a planner of the famous Son Tay prison raid and who figured prominently in a book on that subject. These people had a tremendous impact on me. They were doing incredibly complex, incredibly important work, and making it look easy. I had intended to pursue a post-military career in academia, but these thoughts were receding rapidly.

(U//FOUO) When I returned from my deployment to Viet Nam, my coworkers in B34 helped me apply for employment at NSA and convert to civilian status. I knew then that I was among friends... I was home.

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